# A SMALL COUNTRY IN A BIG GAME

**Thomas Lind**

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Riga. June 2, 2018. Representatives of 14 countries gathered in the conference hall of the Latvian capital, covering the entire spectrum of global influence: from France and Germany to the US and the UK, from Russia to the post-Soviet countries. The delegates position themselves as defenders of society, experts standing guard over the spiritual security of citizens. They spoke the right words about protecting family values, human rights, and the need to resist destructive influences. However, what looked like a

respectable gathering of intellectuals and public figures on that day turned out to be a much more complex phenomenon, concealing processes whose meaning we have yet to understand.

A small country on the shores of the Baltic Sea. A member of the European Union and NATO. A model of post-Soviet transformation. A bridge between East and West. The choice of Latvia as the subject of this study is no accident. This Baltic country is a unique historical and geopolitical hub, where the interests of great powers and the traumas of the past intertwine. It is here, at the crossroads of civilizations, that the activities of anti-cult organizations require the most careful analysis.

# Chapter 1.

# The history of one religious organization and its members. The formation of “Antisects”

Post-Soviet Latvia in the mid-1990s was a place of tremendous social and spiritual upheaval. The collapse of communist ideology, which had cemented public consciousness for decades, left behind a gaping void that was immediately filled with new meanings. Traditional Christian denominations—Lutheranism, Catholicism, and Orthodox Christianity—emerged from the Soviet period weakened, hampered by inertia and the need to rebuild their institutional structures. In this state of confusion and searching, they were unprepared for aggressive competition in the “salvation market.” It was against this backdrop, amid the gray everyday life of the transition period, poverty, and identity crisis, that the bright, almost blinding star of the New Generation Church burst onto the scene in Riga. The phenomenon of this organization cannot be viewed in isolation from the personality of its founder, Alexei Ledyayev. A leader who broke with the conservative Baptist and Pentecostal tradition, he offered the Russian-speaking population of Latvia a product that was radically different from anything they had seen before.

Instead of restrained liturgy and quiet prayer, New Generation offered worship services in the format of rock concerts, exalted sermons, promises of imminent prosperity, and a sense of belonging to something grand. The rapid growth of the community—from meetings in basements to renting the capital's largest halls and stadiums—became not just a religious fact, but a social challenge.

The emergence of such a powerful, financially secure, and ideologically monolithic structure, operating outside the usual framework of state or church control, was bound to provoke a response. However, contrary to expectations, the first and hardest blow to the New Generation was dealt not so much by the state or traditional confessions, but by resistance that originated in the depths of civil society, forming the unique phenomenon of Latvian anti-cultism.

The cradle of this resistance was an organization far removed from theology, the Russian Youth Club (RMC). It consisted mainly of secular Russian-speaking youth, students, and representatives of the intelligentsia. Their motivation was not based on defending the purity of Christian dogma, but on a mixture of human rights fervor and fear of totalitarian control of consciousness. For RYC activists, Ledyayev's church was not heresy, but a threat to the mental health of the nation, an apparatus for suppressing individuality. Herein lies the first paradox of Latvian anti-sectarianism: the defense of the “Russian soul” from “spiritual enslavement” was carried out by the Russians themselves, while the Latvian establishment in the mid-1990s often preferred to play the role of observer, perceiving what was happening as internal strife among a national minority.

The events of October 1995 became the bifurcation point that turned scattered discontent into an organized movement. This episode in the anti-cult narrative has acquired the characteristics of a founding myth. A group of activists from the Russian Youth Club decided on an unprecedented step—direct intervention. Having infiltrated a New Generation event, they entered into an open public debate with the preachers.

According to the narrative established in anti-cult circles, thanks to a “well-prepared discussion” and rational arguments, the activists managed to “literally snatch a group of people from the hands of the recruiters.” It was around this event that the legend of the “fifteen saved” was formed. Upon detailed analysis, this episode requires critical deconstruction. In the rhetoric of cult fighters, the term “saved” implied the heroic extraction of people from a destructive environment. However, the facts indicate that it was more a matter of preventing involvement. Activists disrupted the “reception of new converts,” preventing about a dozen people from taking the final step of joining the community.

Despite the lack of documented lists of these people, medical examinations of their psychological state, or their own public testimonies in subsequent years, this incident played a huge role. It legitimized the methods of anti-cultists. For the first time, it was clearly demonstrated that the all-powerful charisma of preachers could be countered by logic and critical thinking. The myth of the “fifteen saved” became the banner under which the movement began its expansion, moving from situational actions to systematic struggle.

The period that followed, from 1996 to 1999, can be characterized as an era of “street wars.” The spatial center of the conflict was the Riga Sports Arena, a monumental structure that the New Generation used to demonstrate its power, gathering thousands of people for “holiday concerts” and healing services. For anti-cultists, “the Arena became a line of direct confrontation.” It was here that the most dramatic scenes of confrontation unfolded.

The first organized picket at the walls of the Arena in 1996 came as a shock to both parishioners and casual passersby. The scene was dramatic: the cold streets of Riga, streams of people rushing into the warm hall in search of miracles and healing, and a handful of activists with posters and leaflets trying to break through the information blockade.

The picketers' tactics evolved from simple slogans to attempts at individual contact. Activists handed out analytical materials and engaged in dialogue, trying to sow seeds of doubt in the minds of potential neophytes minutes before they fell under the influence of collective ecstasy. The psychological tension of these actions was overwhelming. Church representatives reacted extremely painfully to the pickets. In the rhetoric of the preachers, opponents were demonized, turning from critics into “agents of Satan,” enemies of awakening, and persecutors of faith. The security guards of the “New Generation” repeatedly engaged in verbal and sometimes physical altercations with the picketers. For parishioners, passing through the line of protesters became a kind of test of faithfulness, a test of loyalty to the leader. Nevertheless, street activism had its limits.

By 1999, it became clear that the tactic of “standing at the door” was yielding fewer and fewer results. The novelty effect wore off, and the church adapted to external pressure, learning to ignore the protesters or use their

presence as proof of its own chosenness and martyrdom. The movement needed to transform.

At the turn of the millennium, Latvian anti-cultism became institutionalized. A spontaneous group of volunteers transformed into a structurally organized organization. Back in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Committee for Combating Totalitarian Sects (often referred to as the Latvian Committee for Combating Totalitarian Sects (Anti-Sect).

This was no longer just a club for people with similar interests, but a structure claiming expert status. Lawyers, psychologists, and educators were drawn into its orbit. Street megaphones were replaced by folders with documents and press releases. A key turning point in this evolution was a series of appearances at government venues and public discussions in the late 1990s and early 2000s (including at the level of relevant ministries). The fact that anti-cult activists were invited to government forums signified a tectonic shift: the state de facto recognized the existence of the problem and the legitimacy of anti-cult discourse.

The authorities, who had previously distanced themselves from religious disputes, began to listen to arguments about the “destructive nature” of new movements. This opened the doors of government offices to the Committee.

Since the early 2000s, the tactics of the struggle have changed dramatically. Instead of freezing outside sports arenas, anti-cultists began lobbying for legislative initiatives. A striking example of this new strategy was the picket outside the Seimas building in the early 2000s, where concrete proposals to tighten control over religious organizations were put forward, rather than abstract demands to “stop the sect.”

The committee began to work closely with the media, forming a stable negative image of the “New Generation” and other similar groups in the public consciousness. In the mid-2000s, the “second professional stage” began: the focus shifted to rehabilitation work with victims and legal assistance to those affected.

However, when analyzing the history of this confrontation, one cannot ignore the content of the accusations made against the “New Generation.” The rhetoric of anti-cultists was based on the classic triad: accusations of financial exploitation (tithes, donations), destruction of family ties, and the use of mind control techniques (hypnosis, “zombification”). In the public sphere, these theses were presented as proven facts. The reality was more complicated. The paradox of the situation lay in the significant gap between the severity of the public accusations and their legal provability.

During the period under review (1995–2007), there was no series of successful criminal cases against the leadership of New Generation in Latvia that would unequivocally confirm the facts of violent detention of people, the use of psychotropic substances, or large-scale fraud. The evidence base of anti-cultists was based mainly on the testimony of former followers—the so-called “apostates.” Their stories were undoubtedly full of personal tragedy

and pain, describing an authoritarian management style and psychological pressure, but they did not always contain the elements of a crime as defined by the criminal code. The myth of the “15 saved” is indicative in this context: the absence of names and documentary evidence allowed the event to be interpreted as broadly as desired, but from a legal point of view, it remained in a “gray area.”

In addition, an external factor—the influence of the Russian media—played a significant role in shaping the accusatory bias. Russian federal channels regularly aired exposés about Ledyayev, accusing him of ties to crime and even of organizing brothels, but these allegations, which were also broadcast in the Latvian media, often remained at the level of media statements and were difficult to verify using Latvian sources. Alexei Ledyayev exploited the lack of evidence, building his defense on the position of being a victim of slander and political pressure from Moscow and the Orthodox lobby.

The political and social context of the conflict adds another dimension to this picture—ethnicity. The confrontation between the Committee and the New Generation was, in essence, an intra-species struggle within the Russian-speaking segment of Latvian society. The Latvian political elite had long viewed this conflict with detachment, until Alexei Ledyayev made a strategic mistake by crossing the line separating religion from politics. The proclamation of the theology of the “New World Order,” the creation of the Latvian First Party (associated with Ainars Šlesers), and the open claims to establish theocratic principles of state governance caused Latvian society to shudder.

Anti-cultism ceased to be the domain of a group of enthusiasts and became an instrument of political hygiene. The Committee's arguments that the “New Generation” was creating a “state within a state” suddenly became relevant to national security. In this light, attacks on the church came to be perceived not as an infringement on freedom of conscience, but as a defense of the constitutional order.

It is necessary to acknowledge the duality of the anti-cult movement's results. On the one hand, they failed to stop the physical growth of the New Generation: the number of parishes grew, and Ledyayev's influence extended far beyond Latvia. However, on a symbolic level, the anti-cultists were victorious. They managed to create a lasting toxic aura around the organization. The term “cult” became firmly established in public discourse in relation to non-traditional movements. The actions of the Russian Youth Club and the subsequent Committee formed a lasting pattern in Latvia of perceiving any active religious otherness as a potential threat. The pattern of attacks developed in the confrontation with the New Generation—from disrupting meetings to lobbying for laws—became a universal matrix that predetermined the harsh attitude toward religious minorities in Latvia for many years to come.

# Chapter 2.

# The seminar at the Hotel Islandia and the genesis of systemic anti-cultism (2006)

The summer and early autumn of 2006 in Riga were a time of intoxicating economic optimism, a period that would later be given the bitterly ironic name “the fat years” in public discourse and research. The Latvian capital, having finally recovered from the post-Soviet turbulence of the 1990s and confidently integrating into Euro-Atlantic structures, was experiencing an unprecedented construction and consumer boom. The city was rapidly changing its appearance, shedding the gray skin of its Soviet past and donning the glossy facade of European prosperity.

One of the most striking symbols of this new era was the Hotel Islande, which ceremoniously opened its doors on Kipsala Island in March 2006. The building, sparkling with glass and metal and towering over the waters of the Daugava River, embodied a focus on the future, respectability, and success. It was a space created for serious business, international delegations, and white-collar workers discussing million-dollar investments in the economy of the “Baltic tiger.” The lobbies smelled of expensive leather, fresh finishes, and strong coffee—the aroma of the new life that Latvian society so eagerly sought.

It is precisely this striking, almost cinematic contrast between the ultra-modern, emphatically European facade of the new Riga and the deeply archaic, repressive content of what was happening inside that makes the choice of venue for the 2006 anti-sectarian seminar such a fundamentally significant event. In the conference rooms of this fashionable hotel, equipped with the latest technology, a drama unfolded that historians of religious movements and sociologists would later call the “bifurcation point” of Latvian anti-cultism.

Whereas previously the fight against new religious movements had been waged mainly from church pulpits, in the damp basements of parish schools, and on the pages of marginal black-and-white press, it had now taken an authoritative step into the realm of secular prestige and corporate glamour.

The events that unfolded at the Hotel Islandia cannot be viewed as a routine educational event or another meeting of a concerned public. It was a moment of qualitative phase transition, a transformation of the very nature of the conflict. Here, surrounded by European comfort, a discourse was formed that was deeply anti-European in nature, aimed at the systematic curtailment of religious freedoms and the introduction of mechanisms for strict police control over the spiritual life of citizens. For the participants and organizers, the seminar became a shadow founding congress, a kind of assembly point where the scattered, often chaotic initiatives of individual activists were recast into a rigid systemic structure with an unambiguous claim to state influence.

It was in 2006-2007, within these walls, that the demand to transform abstract theological disputes into concrete issues of national security was first clearly formulated, and ideological opponents were reclassified from “lost sheep” to “agents of foreign influence” and a direct threat to sovereignty. This period drew an invisible but insurmountable line, forever dividing the history of the movement into the artisanal, amateur period “before” and the systematic, institutionalized period “after.”

The success of any large-scale ideological transformation depends not so much on abstract ideas, however contagious they may be, as on specific carriers capable of bringing these ideas to life, giving them form and voice. In 2006, the Latvian anti-cult movement finally found its true organizers, who managed to create a unique and extremely effective symbiosis of academic authority and aggressive political lobbying. The tandem of Oleg Nikiforov and Viktor Yelkin became the driving force that brought the marginal agenda of “fighting heretics” to the level of national debate and government offices.

Oleg Nikiforov played the critically important role of “academic facade” or, to use the terminology of the special services, the role of “legalizer.” A doctor of psychology, associate professor, and lecturer at prestigious universities, he was the ideal, flawlessly honed instrument for legitimizing repressive discourse. Unlike the exalted religious fanatics of the past, who frightened ordinary people with hellfire, Nikiforov spoke in the calm, measured language of science.

He deliberately avoided clerical terms such as “heresy,” “sin,” or “demonic possession,” replacing them with sterile, pseudo-medical constructs: “socio-psychological destruction,” “mind manipulation,” “information addiction,” and “the mental health of the nation.” His high academic status allowed him to “whitewash” ideologically biased, sometimes openly xenophobic theses into respectable scientific facts.

When a professor of psychology from a university department declares the danger of a particular group, officials, journalists, or police officers tend to perceive this not as the private opinion of a believer, but as an objective expert opinion that requires a response. Nikiforov effectively secured the movement's “entry tickets” to the offices of the ministries of education, health, and internal affairs, masterfully transforming the struggle of traditional confessions with their competitors into a state concern for the mental well-being of citizens.

Viktor Yelkin was the complete opposite and, at the same time, an absolutely necessary complement to the reserved professor. He was a “political battering ram,” an ideologist of direct operational action, a man organically focused on conflict, publicity, and expanding his sphere of influence. While Nikiforov worked with form, giving the movement a respectable, civilized appearance, Yelkin generated content imbued with anxiety, urgency, and demandingness. His rhetoric was devoid of academic nuances and scientific caution; it was blunt, aggressive, and mobilizing.

Yelkin acted as a tribune of the people who did not simply state facts but demanded an immediate, tough response from the security forces. In his worldview, which he conveyed to his audience, Latvia was not safe within the European home, but surrounded by enemies, under siege, and only extraordinary, decisive measures could save the nation from enslavement by alien cults. The synthesis of these two approaches filled the institutional void that had previously existed.

Until 2006, the field of combating sects in Latvia was fragmented: individual priests, concerned parents, and sensationalist journalists acted separately, without a unified strategy or goal. Nikiforov and Yelkin came not just to participate in this struggle, but to lead and monopolize it. They offered society and the state a ready-made, turnkey structure, where dubious “scientific” expertise was backed up by fierce civic activism. This tandem became the direct prototype of the future organization “Antisect,” which de jure was only formed in April 2007, but de facto began to function as a well-coordinated mechanism in the cool conference rooms of the Iceland Hotel.

The very fact that the seminar was held at such a prestigious venue deserves separate close analysis from the point of view of resource provision. The abrupt, almost instantaneous move of anti-cult meetings from church annexes, cultural centers, and school classrooms rented by the hour to one of Riga's new four-star conference hotels was an unmistakable sign of the emergence of serious funding and high-level patrons.

A logical question arises: who paid for this “banquet”? It is obvious that a grassroots public initiative, existing on modest membership fees from enthusiasts, could hardly afford to rent such premises, catering, and organize an event of this level.

This irrefutably proves that by 2006, Nikiforov and Yelkin's project had received tacit but significant support from the elites — whether it was the church hierarchies of traditional denominations, who saw the new movements as a threat to their flocks, or representatives of the conservative political establishment, who were looking for new tools for the ideological consolidation of the electorate on the basis of “protecting traditional values.” The seminar was carefully staged not as an internal meeting of like-minded people, but as a presentation of a new political force addressed to the outside world.

The organizers sought to reach beyond the narrow circle of church activists. The audience included not only “anti-cult activists,” but also representatives of the press, educators, social workers, and, most importantly, law enforcement officials. The goal was to show that the anti-cult movement is not a gathering of religious fundamentalists with burning eyes, but a modern, respectable civic initiative, ready to act within the legal framework and help the state solve complex social problems. It was a clever adaptation to European standards of civil society, behind which, however, lay a harsh authoritarian agenda aimed at dismantling the foundations of that very society.

The central event of the seminar, its semantic and ideological core, was Viktor Yelkin's keynote speech. This speech was, in essence, a detailed manifesto of totalitarian control and a detailed “road map” for the development of anti-cultism in Latvia over the next decade. Analyzing Yelkin's theses, three key vectors can be identified, each of which was aimed at undermining the liberal principles of freedom of conscience and the rule of law.

The first and, perhaps, fundamental vector was legal intervention. Yolkin persistently and categorically promoted the requirement to legislate the term “totalitarian sect.” At first glance, to the untrained eye, this might have seemed like a concern for the accuracy of legal wording, an attempt to bring order to terminology. But in reality, it was an attempt at large-scale legal sabotage. The legal frameworks of the European Union and Latvia included the concepts of religious organizations and public associations, but the term “totalitarian sect” was absent as a category. The introduction of this emotionally charged, ideological label into the body of the law would give the state a powerful tool for repression.

The meaning of the maneuver was to replace concepts: instead of proving the specific guilt of an organization or its leaders (fraud, violence, tax evasion), typology was proposed. If the law recognizes a group as a “sect” on the basis of vague, subjective criteria (for example, the presence of a charismatic leader, strict discipline, or belief in its own exclusivity), then it is no longer necessary to prove that actual crimes have been committed in order to ban it. Simply belonging to the group would become a stigma and sufficient grounds for sanctions. This was an attempt to criminalize faith itself if it did not fit within the framework of “tradition.”

The second, and most dangerous requirement from the point of view of civil liberties, was institutionalization through the creation of an Interdepartmental Commission. Yelkin proposed the creation of a permanent state body, whose members would include representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Health, as well as experts from “traditional confessions” and, of course, anti-cultists themselves as consultants. In essence and function, this was a proposal to create a “morality police,” a supranational inquisitorial superstructure where the functions of secular executive power would merge with the religious dogmas of a single denomination.

In such a commission, a priest and a police officer would sit at the same table, deciding the fate of religious minorities. The Ministry of Internal Affairs would receive ideological sanction for persecution, and the church would receive administrative and coercive resources to fight its competitors.

This was a direct call for the creation of a repressive apparatus, removed from standard judicial control procedures, where Nikiforov's “expertise” and Yelkin's denunciations would serve as the only basis for police raids, searches, and arrests.

The third vector of the speech concerned total control over civil society. Yolkin actively promoted the idea of the need to sharply tighten supervision of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Using the rhetoric of a “besieged fortress,” he claimed that foreign agents of influence were operating in Latvia under the guise of religious groups, cultural centers, and charitable foundations. Any organization with headquarters abroad—whether Mormons, Scientologists, Pentecostals, or Hare Krishnas—was a priori considered a threat to national security in his report. Yelkin demanded the introduction of strict audits, restrictions on foreign funding, and complete transparency of membership lists.

There was a clear, unambiguous parallel here with the logic that was legally formalized in Russia by Federal Law No. 18 of January 10, 2006 (on amendments to a number of acts that strengthened control over NGOs), which came into force on April 18, 2006. In this view, religious minorities were presented not as groups of people seeking spiritual salvation, but as a “fifth column,” a spy network requiring not dialogue, but a counterintelligence approach.

A deep analysis of the Riga seminar would be incomplete and superficial without taking into account the broader geopolitical context. The events at the Hotel Islandia were not an isolated, purely local phenomenon that arose in a vacuum. On the contrary, they represented a projection of processes initiated in Moscow. 2006 was the year the Russian Association of Centers for the Study of Religions and Sects (RACIRS) was founded under the permanent leadership of Alexander Dvorkin. The surprising, almost day-for-day synchronicity of these events—the February creation of RACIRS in Moscow and the subsequent stormy activation of Nikiforov and Yelkin in Riga in the second half of the year—cannot be a mere coincidence.

A linguistic and semantic analysis of Yelkin's speech, as well as Nikiforov's numerous publications from that period, reveals a striking textual similarity to Dvorkin's works, in particular his fundamental work “Sectology.” The entire terminological apparatus — “totalitarian sect,” “brainwashing,” “spiritual security,” “biological security of the nation” — as well as the structure of the argumentation and the typology of enemies are direct copies of Moscow manuals. Riga actually became the first foreign testing ground, a trial site where the RACIRS “franchise” was put to the test. Latvian activists did not reinvent the wheel or seek their own path; they imported a ready-made ideological matrix, adapting it to local realities only cosmetically, translating terms into Latvian but preserving their repressive essence.

Latvia's connection to the RAZIRS information and discourse circuit was not formal and bureaucratic, but deeply ideological and methodological. Dvorkin's concept offered a universal language of hatred, conveniently packaged in a pseudo-scientific and pseudo-legal shell. For Nikiforov and Yelkin, this connection was vitally important: Moscow provided the theoretical basis, tons of literature, status, and a sense of belonging to a large international movement. For Moscow, Riga could be seen as a strategically important springboard within the European Union, legitimizing

the Russian model of combating dissent as an allegedly international practice.

Why did this harsh, confrontational rhetoric resonate in 2006, at the height of economic prosperity? The context of the time played into the hands of the organizers. Europe was beginning to feel the first tremors of an identity crisis, and discussions about multiculturalism were becoming increasingly heated. In Russia in 2006, a shift towards the concept of “sovereign democracy” was taking shape and being publicly articulated, accompanied by a tightening of the screws on civil society. In Latvia, a post-traumatic society that had endured decades of occupation and forced assimilation, the fear of losing national identity was and remains a powerful subconscious factor.

Nikiforov and Yelkin masterfully and deliberately played on these deep-seated fears, carrying out a brilliant operation to “securitize” religion. In modern political science, this term refers to the process by which a normal political or social problem is artificially transformed into an existential threat to security, justifying the use of extraordinary measures and the abandonment of democratic procedures. At the seminar at the Iceland Hotel, religion ceased to be an intimate matter of personal choice, salvation of the soul, or family tradition. It was recoded as a matter of the physical survival of the nation.

In this new, frightening paradigm, sects appeared not as theological opponents with whom one could argue using quotations from Scripture, but as bacteriological weapons, a threat to demographics, the psyche, and statehood. The organizers offered the state and society an unspoken deal: we, professional anti-cultists, will provide you with reliable ideological protection from “foreign influence,” and you, the state, will provide us with administrative resources, access to schools, and police powers.

Latvia's traditional denominations, sensing growing competition from active, mobile, and financially independent neo-Protestant movements, silently, and sometimes quite openly, supported this pact, hoping to use Nikiforov and Yelkin as an “icebreaker” to clear the religious market of undesirable elements. It was precisely the ideas voiced on that cool day by Viktor Yelkin and legitimized by the silent presence of Professor Nikiforov that became the framework for the public agenda and self-description of the Anti-Sect organization. It would be officially registered in the spring of the following year, 2007, but its spirit, ideology, and methods were born right here on Kipsala Island.

The seminar set in motion a complex mechanism that was already impossible to stop: ahead lay media campaigns to demonize minorities, attempts to promote an anti-cult agenda in educational circles (around schools and universities) as a separate “threat,” lobbying for discriminatory amendments to laws, and show raids.

On that day at the Hotel Islandia, it was not just another public organization that was formed, but a functioning prototype of a para-state

structure claiming absolute monopoly in determining what Latvian citizens can believe and what is criminal. And although not all of Yolkina's ambitious, essentially totalitarian plans, such as the creation of an all-powerful Interdepartmental Commission, were implemented immediately, the vector of historical movement was set unequivocally: from education to suppression, from discussion to control, from European values to Moscow's practices of “spiritual security.”

# Chapter 3.

# “Experts” without expertise. The “Anti-Sect” triumvirate

In the modern history of the post-Soviet space, it is difficult to find a more telling example of the convergence of seemingly incompatible spheres of public life than that which Latvia presented in the middle of the second decade of the 21st century. The phenomenon of the anti-sectarian movement, which arose on the ruins of Soviet atheism as a reaction to the rapid flourishing of religious diversity of the 1990s, had undergone a fundamental metamorphosis by 2018.

The fight against so-called “destructive cults” ceased to be a matter of protecting the souls of parishioners and transformed into a sophisticated tool for discrediting opponents, mobilizing the electorate, and consolidating conservative segments of society in conditions of geopolitical turbulence. This process was not spontaneous. Behind its crystallization was the activity of a specific group of people whose efforts, merging together, formed a stable structure that is commonly referred to in analytical circles as the “Anti-Sect” triumvirate. The key figures in this alliance were Oleg Nikiforov, Viktor Yelkin, and Svetlana Krylova. Their joint work, formally declared as psychological assistance to victims of manipulation and educational activities, in fact acquired distinct features of political activism, intersecting with the political field around the Latvian Russian Union (Latvijas Krievu savienība, LKS) party and structures close to the church environment.

In order to understand how psychological diagnoses began to replace political arguments and religious affiliation became a marker of loyalty to the state, it is necessary to examine the activities of this union in detail.

Oleg Nikiforov's professional trajectory is a classic and, in many ways, instructive path of an intellectual who sought and found a new niche in an era of tectonic social shifts. A native of Riga, a master of pedagogy, a psychologist—who graduated from the University of Latvia in 1994 with a degree in psychology—he spent many years of painstaking work building a reputation as a serious, thoughtful scholar.

His track record looked impeccable to an outside observer: teaching at the University of Latvia, working at the Riga Aviation University and the Baltic International Academy created the necessary aura of objectivity and expertise. In the eyes of the public and government structures, he was a bearer of knowledge, a representative of academic science, far removed from the passions of street politics.

However, behind the mask of an impartial academic psychologist was a new type of ideologist who sought to achieve a bold synthesis of secular science and religious dogma. Nikiforov grasped the key trend of the time: in a secular society, direct reference to religious canons no longer works as an argument for restricting the rights of other groups. An organization cannot be banned simply because it is “heretical” — this contradicts the constitutional principles of freedom of conscience. But it can be banned or marginalized if it is declared “psychologically dangerous.”

As head of the Latvian Christian Association of Psychologists, Nikiforov began methodically promoting the thesis that an individual's psychological health is inextricably linked to their confessional affiliation with traditional religions, and that any departure from this framework is not a spiritual quest but a form of pathology.

It was this thesis that formed the foundation of the Latvian Committee for Combating Totalitarian Sects (known as “Antisekt,” officially L.C.C.T.S., or Latvian Committee for Combating Totalitarian Sects), which he created in 2007. The name of the organization, which sounded weighty and official, deliberately copied the style of government agencies, although in essence it was a public structure. The committee, declared as a human rights and educational initiative, in fact became a monopolist in determining the “normality” of religious life in the region.

Nikiforov, as co-chair and chief ideologist of the committee, brought about a linguistic revolution in anti-sectarian discourse. He introduced scientific-sounding terminology to replace medieval curses. It was a brilliant substitution in its cold-bloodedness. It allowed the struggle against alternative positions to be taken out of the narrow church ghetto and into the broad civic and legal space. Now a psychologist's expert opinion, written on the committee's letterhead, could be used as an argument for inspections, conflicts with institutions, and press campaigns. With his authority, he covered up the aggressive actions of his associates, turning attacks on religious minorities into concern for the “mental hygiene” of the nation.

Viktor Yelkin took on the role of “field commander,” battering ram, and public face of the movement. A psychologist by training, with a master's degree from Lomonosov Moscow State University (social psychology, 2014), he specialized in the topic of “socio-psychological violence.”

The paradox was that the concept of protection from violence was used to justify violence against members of unpopular groups. Yelkin could apply the criteria of “psychological violence” to virtually any disciplinary

practice within an organization that was unpalatable to the committee — from fasting and prayer to tithing and volunteering.

Since 2004, Yelkin has been actively involved in what was euphemistically called “counseling relatives of adherents.” In practice, this activity often meant participating in processes involving intense psychological pressure on individuals with the aim of destroying their new beliefs and returning them to their previous worldview. Yelkin operated at the intersection of psychology and operational work, often balancing on the edge of the criminal code.

The figure of Viktor Yelkin is important primarily because of his inseparable, organic connection with politics. As an active member of the Russian Union of Latvia (LKS) party, he integrated the anti-sectarian agenda directly into the body of the political program for the protection of the Russian-speaking population of Latvia. Yolkin, who held positions on the party's board and bureau and also worked as an assistant to a member of the European Parliament, used the party's administrative and media resources to promote the theme of the “sectarian threat.”

In his interpretation, the fight against sects became an integral part of the struggle to preserve the cultural identity of the “Russian world” and resist assimilation. Yelkin made an important ideological maneuver: he politicized religion. In his public speeches, sects were presented not simply as misguided groups, but as instruments of Western influence. Thus, for Yelkin, his work at the L.C.C.T.S. and his membership in the LKS were not two separate spheres of activity, but represented a single ideological approach. His status as an assistant to a Member of the European Parliament gave his statements international weight, allowing him to translate local conflicts into broader public and international discussions under the guise of “human rights protection,” where only “traditional” believers had rights.

The third link, ensuring the deep stability of this alliance, was Svetlana Krylova. Although she may seem less prominent in academic circles than Nikiforov and less public in big politics than Yelkin, her role in the triumvirate was critically important. She ensured direct communication and ideological synchronization with the Orthodox church environment in Latvia.

In the structure of the anti-sectarian movement, where secular laws often conflict with religious interests, a mediator was vitally necessary. Someone capable of translating the complex language of psychology into the understandable language of preaching and vice versa. Krylova was just such an activist: in publications and interviews, she appears as a representative of the Latvian Committee for Combating Totalitarian Sects. She had the ability to mobilize parish networks, turning passive believers into active participants in public campaigns. Her activities helped legitimize the actions of the L.C.C.T.S. in the eyes of the church community.

She acted as a guarantor that Nikiforov's ethically questionable psychological experiments and Yolkina's political populism did not conflict with the interests of the clergy, but served to protect the Church.

Krylova embodied moral authority and the so-called “voice of the people.” When the committee needed to demonstrate “public outrage” at the activities of any organization, it was through Krylova's channels that letters of protest, signature collections, and pickets could be organized. She created the illusion of broad grassroots support, which was extremely important for LKS politicians who sought to show that they represented the aspirations of ordinary people.

In the triumvirate, she was responsible for sacralizing the struggle, turning electoral choice or the persecution of competitors into an act of professing faith. The culmination of this alliance's activities, the point at which all the techniques developed over the years were put into action with maximum force, was the events surrounding the 2018 parliamentary elections (elections to the Latvian Seimas).

These elections took place against the backdrop of an unprecedented escalation of the geopolitical situation, the consequences of the 2014 events in Crimea, and internal ethnic conflicts in Latvia related to education reform and language issues. For the LKS party, these elections were a matter of political survival. The party, which traditionally relied on the protest vote of the Russian-speaking minority, sensed fatigue among its voters. The old agenda of protecting schools and language, although still relevant, needed emotional reinforcement and new bright colors capable of shaking up an apathetic audience.

This is where the tools developed within the L.C.C.T.S. came in handy. In the run-up to the 2018 elections, anti-sectarian rhetoric was skillfully woven into the fabric of political campaigning. The technique consisted of creating and promoting the image of a “besieged fortress.” Voters were led to believe that the threat to Russian people in Latvia came not only from the ethnocratic Latvian establishment, which passed discriminatory laws, but also from insidious internal enemies — “sectarians” who, according to the movement's ideologues, were agents of spiritual decay.

A reality was constructed in which the external enemy (NATO, the West, Latvian nationalists) joined forces with the internal enemy (non-traditional religions) to destroy the “cultural code” and identity. As a member of LKS and a recognizable media personality, Viktor Yelkin actively used publications and public appearances in the media to broadcast these ideas.

The political context of 2018 made it possible to turn the fight against sects into a universal marker of “us versus them.” Any political opponent who was seen to have ties to non-traditional religious groups, attended yoga classes, or simply expressed liberal views on freedom of conscience risked being immediately labeled a “sectarian” or “cult accomplice.” This was an effective way to discredit competitors in the “Russian field” (for example, representatives of the Soglasie party), who were accused of not being firm enough in defending traditional values.

The pseudoscientific basis prepared by Oleg Nikiforov played a special role in this campaign. During the election campaign, technologies of stigmatization through pathologization were used. Competitors were not simply criticized for their economic or social programs—they were diagnosed. They were attributed with mental instability, brainwashing, and dependence on manipulative technologies allegedly characteristic of totalitarian cults. This was a qualitatively new level of political struggle, where the opponent was dehumanized. His position was declared not to be a different opinion, but the result of "brainwashing," which automatically deprived him of his subjectivity and right to dialogue. Voters were asked not to choose between programs, but to choose between "healthy forces" (LKS) and "sick puppets."

The joint activities of Nikiforov, Yelkin, and Krylova during this period demonstrated the highest degree of coordination, functioning with refined harmony. Nikiforov provided the theoretical justification, publishing "analytical" articles and commenting on "psychological security" in party newspapers. Yelkin put this into practice through the party structures of the LKS and his status as an assistant to a member of the European Parliament, positioning the issue as one of "human rights."

Paradoxically, human rights rhetoric was used to justify restrictive measures against minorities. Krylova, in turn, worked "on the ground" with the conservative core of the electorate—pensioners, churchgoers, and activists from Russian public organizations.

She conveyed a simple but powerful idea: voting for the "right" candidates (representatives of the LKS) is the religious duty of an Orthodox Christian who protects his faith and church from desecration by infidels and sectarians.

It should be noted that the use of anti-sectarian themes as a political tool in 2018 was not a purely local Latvian phenomenon. It reflected a general, broader trend in the Russian and pro-Russian political arena at the time, where the concept of "sect" was blurred to the extreme. For propaganda purposes, this definition began to include completely harmless commercial organizations, personal growth training courses, environmental movements, human rights NGOs, and opposition political groups. The rhetoric of the LKS and the L.C.C.T.S. committee showed a clear, unambiguous correlation with Russian state discourse, where "sect" had become a de facto synonym for "foreign agent."

Criminal cases, raids, and arrests of religious community leaders in Russia during that period created the necessary informational background, which Nikiforov and Yelkin skillfully projected onto the Latvian reality. They intimidated voters with the possibility of a repeat of scenarios of spiritual catastrophe and presented themselves as the only defenders. Analyzing the biographies and activities of the triumvirate, three types of connections can be identified that cement this structure and make it so effective.

First, there is the institutional connection through the L.C.C.T.S. The committee became a legal “umbrella,” a legal entity that allowed them to operate within the legal framework, receive grants, and interact with the state. Second, there is ideological convergence based on shared religious values and a desire to preserve cultural traditions. This ideology combined the scientific atheism of the past with the religious zeal of the present into a strange but durable alloy.

Thirdly, there was a pragmatic political connection through the LKS party, which provided a platform, media resources, and access to the electorate. In this scheme, everyone played their own unique role.

The image of the enemy sectarian, carefully constructed by Nikiforov and Yelkin, turned out to be a universal bogeyman. It allowed social discontent, economic anxiety, and the population's fears about the future to be channeled in the right direction. There was no need to explain the complexity of economic reforms or geopolitical arrangements—it was enough to point to the “enemy” who wants to take your soul and the souls of your children. This is a clear example of how easily the lofty concepts of spirituality and science can be put at the service of entirely earthly and selfish interests in the struggle for power, how noble slogans about protecting the family and spirituality can become a cover for building an authoritarian micro-model within a democratic society.

In this system of coordinates, a diagnosis is made of an opponent instead of an argument in a dispute, and a scientific degree is used as a club to suppress dissent. LKS and its affiliated structures have set a precedent where a person's religious and psychological identity has become the subject of political speculation. The lesson taught by Nikiforov, Yelkin, and Krylova goes far beyond the specific election campaign. They showed that fear of the unknown and the desire to find simple culprits for complex problems remain the most powerful levers for controlling mass consciousness. And when professionals press these levers, society finds itself virtually defenseless in the face of a new radical form of pressure.

In this complex and multi-layered structure of political pressure and social repression that is being built in the modern space, physical coercion or administrative bans are rarely used without careful prior preparation of public consciousness. In order for the repressive apparatus, launched by the political ambitions of structures such as the “Russian Union of Latvia” (LKS) and the clerical interests of the dominant denomination, to function while maintaining the appearance of legality and civility, an impenetrable shell of objective, secular justification is necessary.

This is where the phenomenon of epistemological violence comes to the fore, masterfully implemented through the activities of the anti-sectarian triumvirate.

The usurpation of the right to truth by a group of individuals without specialized academic training in religious studies becomes the key hinge on which the massive door from constitutional freedom of conscience to the

persecution of free thought silently swings. The fundamental paradox of the current situation is that fateful court decisions that destroy the lives of specific people, break up families, and lead to the elimination of law-abiding religious organizations are not based on a rigorous legal analysis of the facts and, more importantly, not on fundamental religious studies expertise designed to study beliefs in their historical, theological, and social context. On the contrary, legal verdicts are based on subjective, speculative psychological constructs created by a narrow group of individuals whose competence in matters of religion is not so much a proven fact as a carefully constructed and maintained myth.

Upon closer, critical examination, Nikiforov's academic trajectory reveals fatal gaps that are completely incompatible with the role of a leading expert on new religious movements. Nikiforov's basic education, received at the Daugavpils Pedagogical Institute, lies in the field of biology and chemistry. Only later did his professional path turn toward psychology. At the same time, his academic background, impressive at first glance, completely lacks specialized education in the field of religious studies, academic theology, or the sociology of religion. This is not just a gap in his diploma, it is a fundamental flaw in his perspective: Nikiforov approaches the most complex and subtle phenomena of spiritual life and social choice with tools inherited from biology and clinical psychology, which inevitably leads to gross reductionism. For such a researcher, religion that differs from the usual cultural norm is not a form of social existence, not the result of spiritual search, and not an existential choice. But even more egregious than the lack of specialized education is the institutional conflict of interest inherent in the very structure of his career and public activity.

As a teacher at the Riga Theological Seminary, an educational institution whose direct task is to train personnel for the Russian Orthodox Church, and as the head of the Latvian Christian Association of Psychologists, Nikiforov is de facto in a professionally marked position. When such a person appears in court as an “independent secular expert” evaluating the activities of Pentecostals, Baptists, or Hare Krishnas, we are faced with a situation whose absurdity is comparable to that of a soccer player suddenly putting on a referee's uniform and starting to hand out red cards to players on the opposing team. In this configuration, his expert conclusions cease to be scientific documents and turn into theological polemics, cleverly disguised as clinical diagnoses.

As in the case of his senior colleague, Yelkin's expertise lies entirely outside the realm of scientific study of religion. He positions himself as an expert on “socio-psychological violence” — a term that, in his loose interpretation, takes on the properties of a “rubber baton” capable of striking any target. The definition of “violence” can easily be applied to any active missionary activity, strict intra-group ethics, fasting or prayer discipline, as well as the high emotional involvement of adherents, characteristic of most religious minorities and revival movements. Yolkin's positioning is based on a fundamental logical and methodological error: he undertakes to judge the nature of complex social institutions, such as

religious communities, using the limited tools of individual therapy and traumatology. A psychologist working with individuals does not have the methodology to assess the sociological processes of community formation, group dynamics, and the historical development of dogma.

However, it is precisely this inconsistency, this professional blindness, that allows Yelkin and his colleagues to draw conclusions of cosmic proportions based on isolated, often emotionally charged complaints from former members or their relatives.

They reduce complex, multifaceted spiritual and social phenomena to primitive, black-and-white “manipulator-victim” schemes, completely ignoring the subjectivity of believers, their rational choices, and free will. A critical analysis of the activities of L.C.C.T.S. would be incomplete and one-sided without taking into account the voice of civil society, which has become the direct target of these pseudoscientific experiments. The essence of the problem was most accurately, concisely, and boldly formulated by the Latvian publicist and social activist Ervīns Jākabsons (Ervīns Jākabsons). In his investigation (Uzmanību – antisektanti, translated into English as “Attention – Opponents of Sectarianism!”), which has become a landmark for understanding the situation, he reveals the deep ideological, rather than scientific, background to the actions of the triumvirate.

Analyzing the activities of the “anti-sectarians,” Jākabsons puts forward a central argument: under the steamroller of the repressive machine, controlled by the expert conclusions of the L.C.C.T.S., are not marginal, criminal groups or esoteric death cults, as declared in frightening media reports, but law-abiding, historically rooted Christian denominations whose only fault is their activity and independence from the Russian Orthodox Church. Jakobsons points to the blatant indiscriminateness of these “experts,” for whom any deviation from the Orthodox or strictly Lutheran canon, any liveliness of faith, automatically becomes a sign of sectarianism and danger. His analysis contains a key idea that has become the verdict on the professional reputation of the L.C.C.T.S.: "*The organization's officially stated goal—to combat destructive sects—would not be laughed at if it really fought dangerous sects and cults. However, although Antisekt positions itself as a professional organization, it is completely incapable of distinguishing destructive cults from Christian movements and communities that are accepted in the world but less common in Latvia and whose activities are harmless*." This harsh wording is the essence of the problem. It emphasizes that Nikiforov and Yelkin are not acting in the paradigm of protecting the rights of citizens or public health, but in the paradigm of rigidly protecting the market for religious services for the dominant church and clearing the political field.

By labeling Protestant churches—Pentecostals, Charismatics, Baptists—which are a respected part of the religious mainstream throughout the civilized world as “destructive cults,” they are fulfilling a very specific ideological agenda.

Jakobsons rightly notes that such activity has nothing to do with science; it is pure ideological struggle, where the pseudoscientific label “sect” is used as a stigma to discredit competitors. For Antisect, there is no difference between a real criminal threat and simply a “different” faith, and it is this selective blindness that reveals them to be ideological soldiers rather than impartial researchers. This conclusion finds powerful, irrefutable confirmation when the activities of the Latvian triumvirate are placed in the broader context of global academic science. The methodological foundation on which Nikiforov and Yelkin base their formidable expert opinions is based on the concepts of “brainwashing” and “zombification.”

However, it is important to clearly understand that these theories are not recognized as valid scientific models in the modern academic scientific community. At the end of the 20th century, the American Psychological Association (APA) — the most authoritative and influential association of psychologists in the world — officially refused to recognize the theory of “brainwashing” as scientifically valid. In particular, a report by a working group led by Margaret Singer was not accepted by the APA precisely because of its methodological inconsistency and lack of reproducible evidence. The verdict was that there is no empirical evidence that religious conversion can occur against a person's will under the influence of some mysterious “psychological techniques” that allegedly suppress the personality. The global scientific community has recognized that humans are beings with free will, and that the choice of religion, even the most exotic, is an act of that will, not the result of hypnosis.

Contemporary sociology of religion, represented by such luminaries as Eileen Vartan Barker and Massimo Introvigne, and in the post-Soviet space by the authoritative school of I.Ya. Kanterov and E.S. Elbakyan, unequivocally classifies militant “anti-cultism” (to which L.C.C.T.S. ideologically belongs) not as a scientific discipline, but as a specific secular religion or ideology of intolerance. Contemporary science operates with the neutral terms “new religious movements,” studies the dynamics of conversion and socialization, but categorically rejects the primitive determinism preached by Nikiforov and Yelkin. The fact that Latvian “experts” continue to use discredited, populist rhetoric from the 1970s about “brainwashing” in all seriousness in their documents submitted to judges testifies to their existence in a deep, hermetic academic vacuum.

Their theories are not verified by the scientific community, are not published in peer-reviewed international journals with a high impact factor (outside of narrowly confessional or “pocket” publications), but they are ideally suited to the needs of “punitive” psychiatry and repressive judicial proceedings. The gap between world science, which recognizes the subjectivity and rationality of religious choice, and the practice of L.C.C.T.S., which reduces faith to hypnosis and illness, demonstrates that we are dealing with scientific imitation. The lack of specialized religious studies expertise is not an unfortunate omission, an accidental gap in education, or a “bug” in the system. On the contrary, it is its most important functional characteristic, its supporting structure. It is precisely the blatant

incompetence in rigorous academic religious studies that gives them free rein to carry out their orders.

A true scholar of religious studies, bound by professional ethics, knowledge of methodology, and historical context, could never sign a conclusion equating a voluntary prayer meeting with an act of psychological violence, or the donation of tithes with financial fraud. The scholar sees complexity; the ideologist sees an enemy. The activities of Nikiforov, Yelkin, and Krylova, who has joined them, represent the creation of a parallel epistemological reality. In this artificially created reality, under the guise of “European independent expertise,” lies a well-oiled process of suppressing alternative opinions. This mechanism does not investigate objective reality, but rather shapes and molds the image of the enemy necessary to mobilize the electorate and justify police measures. “Experts” without expertise turn out to be an ideal, indispensable tool, where science is finally transformed into a silent servant of ideology. The lack of professionalism, so astutely pointed out by Jakobsons, is more than compensated for by political loyalty and a willingness to do the dirty work of cleansing the spiritual space, making this group a key element in the structure of authoritarian control over society.

The key to understanding the role of the LKS as an instrument of “soft power” in the Baltic region lies in the intertwining of human rights rhetoric, aggressive criticism of Latvian nationalism, and specific psychological manipulation practiced by affiliated organizations. The ideological foundation of the Latvian Russian Union party has historically been built around the concept of an existential threat. Since its transformation from the ZaPCHEL association into an independent political entity, the party has consistently cultivated a sense of siege mentality among its electorate. The central element of this construct has been the protection of the Russian language, which in the rhetoric of party leaders is presented not simply as a means of communication, but as a sacred marker of identity that is being systematically destroyed.

Criticism of Latvian nationalism by LKS speakers invariably goes beyond the discussion of minority rights, taking on the characteristics of geopolitical loyalty to a neighboring state. The party does not simply oppose education reforms or language quotas; it conveys the narrative that Latvian statehood in its current form is a historical mistake or, at the very least, an injustice to the “Russian world.” This position is reinforced by an explicit, undisguised pro-Russian orientation and close contacts with Russian political structures, including organizations and movements associated with the concept of the “Russian world,” such as “Russian Unity.” Thus, the ideology of LKS forms a stable rejection of integration processes among its voters, offering instead an alternative reality where Latvia is viewed exclusively through the prism of the interests of its eastern neighbor. In this ideological context, the nature of the interaction between the leadership of Antisect and the leader of LKS, Andrei Mamikin, which took the form of a strategic partnership, becomes more understandable. Understanding this deep interconnection is an absolutely necessary prerequisite for analyzing the

events of 2018. Without this context, any episode of their joint activity may seem like a routine event. However, knowing that Viktor Yelkin sits on the council of the party from which Mamikin is running, and knowing that Antisect uses its platform to promote specific social fears, we can take a completely different look at the chronology of their public appearances. This brings us to the need for a detailed analysis of a specific historical moment that became a kind of public manifestation of this alliance.

# Chapter 4.

# Riga 2018: The Conference That “Didn't Happen”

The first Saturday of June 2018 in Riga was unusually calm, but outside the doors of one of the conference halls in the Latvian capital, the air was electrified with tension. Here, away from prying eyes and random passers-by, an event was unfolding that would later be called one of the most mysterious events in the recent history of European anti-cultism. The FECRIS conference, officially announced as an educational event under the auspices of the Latvian Committee for Combating Totalitarian Sects (L.C.C.T.S.), turned out to be a gathering shrouded in secrecy.

If today, years later, one attempts to reconstruct the chronology of that day, the researcher will encounter a paradoxical information vacuum. In an era of digital transparency, when even the most insignificant event leaves behind a trail of articles, information about the event, photos, hashtags, and geotags, the FECRIS meeting in Riga looks like a completely insignificant meeting. The minimal amount of information available seems not just a coincidence, but a deliberate strategy to “clean up” the information field, designed to conceal the true scale and composition of the meeting's participants. The absence of a detailed public report and the minimal amount of available references are difficult to explain as mere coincidence; rather, they indicate a deliberate attempt to limit the external information presence of the event.

The only reliable source shedding light on what happened inside was an internal document from the French organization UNADFI (Union Nationale des Associations de Défense des Familles et de l’Individu, or National Union of Associations for the Defense of Families and Individuals) — a report that, like an accidental leak, allows us to peek behind the scenes. It is thanks to these sparse but informative lines that we can reconstruct the picture of that day and, more importantly, understand who exactly gathered in Riga and for what purpose. The tone of the event was set by a person whose name today evokes associations in Latvia that are quite different from

the struggle for spiritual security. The conference was opened by Andrei Mamikin, at that time a respected member of the European Parliament from the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats.

In his opening speech, he spoke confidently about the need for dialogue with religious organizations, referring to Article 17 of the EU Treaty. However, his rhetoric quickly changed direction: Mamikin lamented Europe's lack of a “strong tool” to combat what he called sectarianism and praised FECRIS as the only force capable of countering this threat. Looking at this scene from today's perspective, it is impossible to shake off a feeling of sinister irony: a man who called for tighter control over dissent for the sake of “security” would, just a few years later, find himself wanted internationally for justifying war crimes and supporting aggression against Ukraine. This fact casts a shadow over the entire gathering: if the organizer and ideologist of the meeting found himself on the wrong side of the law and morality of the civilized world, what was the true nature of the ideas discussed under his patronage? What did they actually agree on in the corridors of the Riga hotel?

After the opening remarks, the “field commanders” of the anti-cult movement took the floor. Oleg Nikiforov, as co-chair and founder of the host party, played the role of host, welcoming the guests. But the real moderator of the ideological vector was Danièle Muller-Tulli from Switzerland, president of FECRIS. Her presence emphasized the high status of the event: Riga was chosen not as a periphery, but as a central platform. The agenda, hidden behind the innocuous title “Education in the Face of Sects” (referred to in the bulletin as L'éducation face aux sectes), turned out to be a detailed analysis of methods of ideological struggle and lobbying for restrictive measures in education. One of the key speakers was Svetlana Krylova. Her report was devoted to a rehabilitation program for former followers. However, behind the professional terminology lay frightening generalizations. Krylova painted a grim picture, mentioning cases of suicide among young people allegedly recruited via the Internet, and focused on “problematic psychological groups” and personal growth training. In her interpretation, virtually any non-traditional spiritual or psychological practice could be classified as a threat requiring the intervention of specialists — affiliated with her organization, of course.

Particularly alarming in her words was the thesis that Latvian authorities and families lack information, and therefore the Latvian Ministry of Education was forced to “turn to Europe for help.” This sounded not like a request for methodological support, but like an admission of surrendering sovereignty in matters of spiritual education to external curators. And so, under the guise of concern for “security” and under the slogan of a “single European standard,” a foreign right to determine what can be read, what can be believed, and who can be loved is quietly creeping into the country. Of course, in an era when every click on the internet leaves a trace, it is important to know what is being broadcast in our families and society, but it is also important to understand that those who today have a monopoly on the label “sect” will tomorrow claim the right to “truth.” And behind this label

are specific accounts, grants, influence indices — and foreign voices ready to rewrite our past and sell our future.

The geography of the participants clearly demonstrated the scale of coordination. Lucienne Bouvier de Cachard, president of the organization Secticide, arrived from France. The very name of this structure reflects its strongly anti-cult identity. In his report, he discussed “education with regard to the risks of the New Age,” posing the question bluntly: what model of society do we want for Europe? The answer was self-evident: a model cleansed of “incorrect” spiritual influences.

He was supported by his colleague from the German government, Mirijam Wiedemann, who represented the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports of Baden-Württemberg. Her speech concerned the limits of the state's educational mandate in the face of religious pluralism. The presence of a current German ministry official lent legitimacy to the meeting, but at the same time raised questions: how ethical is it for a representative of the state to participate in such a closed and ideologically charged event?

A special place in the program was given to an attack on alternative educational systems. Grégoire Perra from France launched a harsh criticism of Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf schools. His report was not just a critique of the methodology, but a veritable indictment. Perra claimed that these schools, taking advantage of the vulnerability of children with learning or behavioral problems, were in fact engaged in indoctrination. He described the inner life of Waldorf schools as a realm of laxity, violence, and hidden esoteric influence, where pedagogical incompetence is masked as “personal development.” This focus on a specific educational system with a long history in Europe looked like a specific order to discredit competitors to the state school system.

The link between social activists and the state apparatus of repression was embodied by Laurence Peyron, education advisor to the French interministerial mission MIVILUDES. This is a unique structure in Europe — a state body created specifically for “vigilance and combating sectarian deviations.” Peyron directly declared the advent of an “era of well-being” in education, which she regarded as a threat. Meditation, enneagrams, nonviolent communication—all these practices, which are finding their way into schools, were named by her as potential channels of sectarian influence, which in fact broadened the field of suspicion to include any form of alternative pedagogy and psychology. In essence, the French official conveyed the idea of total suspicion: any teacher who decided to hold a minute of silence or a stress-relief exercise with children could find themselves under scrutiny as a potential recruiter.

The Russian vector at the conference was represented by Artem Grigoryan. His participation was strategically important for creating the image of an “enemy” in the East. Grigoryan, presented as a former member of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, shared a story about how the organization allegedly prevented him from obtaining higher education. In the context of the harsh repression against Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, which

began a year earlier (the organization was banned in 2017), Grigoryan's speech in Riga looked like an ideological justification and export of Russian methods of combating religious minorities to European soil. It was a vivid example of how narratives formed under authoritarian pressure are integrated into European discourse under the guise of protecting human rights. However, the list of participants was not limited to Europeans and representatives of the post-Soviet space.

The conference was attended by a “landing party” of Western experts whose names are well known in deprogramming circles. Jon Atack arrived from the UK to present the OpenMinds Foundation project. He was joined by Yuval Laor from the US. Their agenda shifted the focus from legal aspects to psychological ones. Laor presented the theory of “fear and zeal,” attempting to provide a scientific explanation for the mechanisms of religious belief as a pathology or the result of manipulation. It was a subtle move: if belief cannot be prohibited by law, it can be pathologized by declaring it the result of an “intense emotional experience” requiring treatment. The audience also included representatives of specialized organizations from other countries, creating a sense of a broad international front. Kerstine Vanderput from Belgium, director of the Center for Information and Advice on Harmful Sectarian Organizations (CIAOSN), spoke about the “virtual threat” and the need for new criteria for assessing the harmfulness of groups.

Her Dutch colleague, Karin Krijnen, director of SektenSignaal (a mixed private-public organization), shared her experience of working with hotlines and investigating closed groups. Spanish psychologist Miguel Perlado, president of AIIAP (La Asociación Iberoamericana para la Investigación del Abuso Psicológico), expanded the list of threats to include Catholic movements (Opus Dei, Legionaries of Christ) and personal growth groups that are allegedly infiltrating Spanish schools. The atmosphere of secrecy surrounding this meeting becomes understandable when one analyzes the composition of the participants and the content of the reports. This was not a scientific symposium where different points of view collide. It was a council of like-minded people developing a unified strategy of attack. The presence of active officials (Peiron, Wiedemann) alongside radical critics of religion and former adherents created a dangerous symbiosis. The absence of photographs and widespread publicity was probably dictated by a desire to avoid public protests and uncomfortable questions from human rights activists. After all, what was discussed behind closed doors in Riga—restricting religious pluralism, pathologizing faith, creating mechanisms for state control over the spiritual life of citizens—would hardly have been understood by the general European public, accustomed to considering freedom of conscience an unshakable value. The FECRIS board meeting held the day before, on June 1, attended by David Clark, the federation's representative to the UN, only confirms the seriousness of their intentions. Riga became a meeting place where local initiatives to combat “dissent” attempted to forge a unified international network. And the figure of Andrei Mamikin, who opened the meeting, serves as an eloquent symbol of the path that such “protection” can lead society down.

The history of modern Latvia knows many examples of political adaptation to changing conditions, but the case of Andrei Mamikin stands out in terms of the scale of transformation. In less than ten years, this man has gone from being one of the country's most popular television journalists and a respected member of the European Parliament to an international fugitive hiding from justice. To understand the Mamikin phenomenon, we need to look at the origins of his development as a person and a professional. Andrei Vladimirovich Mamikin was born on March 11, 1976, in Leningrad, a city with powerful symbolic significance in Soviet and post-Soviet mythology.

Moving to Riga at an early age did not sever his mental connection with the “cultural capital” of the empire. On the contrary, his Leningrad origins would later become an important element of his self-identification and a hidden marker for the pro-Russian audience, allowing him to position himself as a bearer of “high Russian culture” in contrast to the national aspirations of Latvians. His education played a key role in honing his skills with words. Mamikin graduated from the philological faculty of the University of Latvia. His deep academic immersion in the structure of language and literature gave him a powerful tool. He learned not just to speak, but to construct meanings, substitute concepts, and masterfully play on the emotional strings of his audience. His philological background later allowed him to package aggressive propaganda in the guise of intellectual reflection on “cultural codes” and “the protection of the Russian language,” which made his rhetoric particularly dangerous and attractive to the intelligent part of the Russian-speaking electorate. His journalism career, which began in 1996, became a testing ground for honing these skills. His work for the print publications SM, Chas, and Subbota laid the foundation for his recognition, but the real breakthrough came with his arrival on television. In the period leading up to 2014, Mamikin became the face of the program Bez Cenzury (Uncensored) on TV5.

This show was not just an informational product, but a powerful socio-political phenomenon in the life of Russian-speaking Latvia. It was in the TV5 studio that Andrey Mamikin's public image was constructed — an uncompromising “fighter for the truth,” a defender of the oppressed, and the only person willing to talk about uncomfortable things. He masterfully used the talk show format to polarize opinions, often pitting guests against each other and creating an atmosphere of scandal, which invariably translated into high ratings. Even then, elements of manipulation were evident in his work: selective presentation of facts, emotional manipulation of the viewer, and constant harping on the theme of discrimination against the Russian-speaking minority. Media recognition became the springboard that allowed the journalist to jump into the seat of a European politician, bringing with him a baggage of populism and the ability to manipulate public opinion.

Andrey Mamikin's entry into big politics in 2014 seemed like a logical continuation of his public activities. His election to the European Parliament on the list of the social democratic party Saskaņa (Harmony) should, it would seem, have integrated him into the Latvian political system. However, it was precisely his time in Brussels that marked the beginning of his rapid

alienation from Latvian interests and his drift towards a radical pro-Russian agenda.

It is important to make the necessary clarification: when talking about modern Russia in this context, as now (and also earlier and later), we in no way equate all residents of the country with anti-cultists. When we talk about the pro-Russian agenda or the export of Russian ideology, we are analyzing the actions of specific state institutions, associated public structures, and propagandists. In Russia, as in any other country, there is a huge diversity of opinions, and many citizens are horrified to see their country turning into a besieged fortress. However, the subject of our analysis is precisely the institution that has monopolized the right to truth and actively exports its repressive practices.

His work in the European Parliament (2014–2019) revealed Mamakin's true ambitions. It soon became clear that party discipline and the moderate, integration-oriented line of Soglasie weighed heavily on the newly minted MEP. He began to play his own game, often at odds with the position of the faction and the interests of the party that had delegated him. Conflicts with the leadership of Soglasie, in particular with Nils Ušakovs, became public and regular. Mamikin used the European Parliament's platform not to solve the pressing problems of his constituents, but for self-promotion and to voice ideas that increasingly resonated with Moscow's foreign policy positions. His status as an MEP became the perfect cover for him: it gave him broad freedom of public expression, immunity, and, most importantly, a legitimate international platform for broadcasting anti-Latvian narratives under the guise of “human rights activism.”

In the context of analyzing his ties to Russian influence structures, the 2018 episode of his participation in the FECRIS conference deserves special attention. At first glance, this event seems like an insignificant episode in his biography, but upon closer examination, it reveals deep ties to the Russian ideological apparatus. For many years, FECRIS has been criticized by human rights activists and academic researchers for its ideological bias, close ties to the Russian Orthodox Church, and cooperation with Russian government agencies in the fight against religious and ideological dissent. The Latvian politician's participation in an event of this kind, his speeches in unison with representatives affiliated with Russian “spiritual security” centers, indicate that by 2018 Mamykins was already deeply integrated into the Russian “soft power” network. By speaking at this event, he effectively legitimized Russian narratives about the “spiritual threats” of the West and the need to protect “traditional values” — theses that, a few years later, would become the ideological justification for military aggression. This was the moment when his personal rhetoric became synchronized with the Kremlin's global strategy. After his term in the European Parliament ended (2019), Mamikin remained an active politician. He continued to work in the “Latvian Russian Union,” spoke at rallies, and gave interviews. But with each passing year, his rhetoric became more radical. He increasingly criticized “Latvian nationalism.” He increasingly defended Russia's actions on the international stage. He appeared more and more often on Russian television channels.

For many, this was a worrying sign, but Latvia is a democratic country and freedom of speech is protected by the constitution. Mamikin had a right to his opinion, even if it was unpopular. Everything changed on February 24, 2022. When Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the world was divided. The overwhelming majority of countries condemned the aggression. Latvia, as a member of the EU and NATO, immediately sided with Ukraine. And then Mamykins had to make a choice. He remained in Latvia but began to openly support the Russian invasion. On September 21, 2023, the program “Evening with Vladimir Solovyov” aired on the Russia-1 television channel. In the studio were Vladimir Solovyov, a man on the sanctions lists of all Western countries, and his guest, Andrei Mamikin. Solovyov asked a question about the “special military operation” (as the war in Ukraine is called in Russia). Mamikin responds, and his words will go down in history as evidence in a criminal case: “Russia is doing a great and holy deed in Ukraine.” This was not a slip of the tongue. It was not taken out of context. It was a clear, conscious position. A war in which tens of thousands of people are dying, cities are being destroyed, and millions are becoming refugees is, according to Mamikin, a “great and holy cause.”

The next day, his words were quoted by all Latvian media outlets. The Latvian State Security Service (VDD) did not delay. On September 29, 2023, a criminal case was opened under Article 74.1 of the Criminal Code: “Justification of genocide, crimes against humanity, crimes against peace, and war crimes.” In civilized countries, this is punishable by imprisonment. Mamykin faced five to fifteen years in prison. But his words on Solovyov's show were not the only evidence. The VDD analyzed all of his appearances on Russian television channels over the previous months. There was the same rhetoric: praise for the “special operation,” accusations of “Nazism” against Ukraine, support for the Kremlin. Mamikin systematically violated the law. In the summer of 2024, he disappeared from Latvia. Officially, he left “for personal reasons”; unofficially, he fled to Russia to escape criminal prosecution. In July of that year, he was placed on an international wanted list. Once in Russia, Mamikin did not go into hiding; on the contrary, he became even more active. In August 2024, he launched his own channel, regularly giving airtime in his videos to marginal figures, radicals, and open opponents of the Latvian state. The Latvian government was compared on his broadcasts to Nazi Germany in the 1930s, and any actions taken by Riga to strengthen national security were interpreted as preparation for ethnic cleansing or aggression against Russia. These invectives sounded particularly sarcastic precisely because they were uttered from a studio in Moscow, the capital of a state that, at that very moment, was implementing with frightening meticulousness the very historical reconstructions that Mamikin accused Riga of.

It was a classic psychological projection elevated to the status of state policy: accusing your opponent of your own sins in order to preemptively devalue any claims against yourself. As if in a crooked mirror, the former Latvian politician described the horrors of the “Nazi regime,” but seemed to be simply looking out the window of his apartment, refusing to recognize in the marching columns the real, not fictional, embodiment of the totalitarian

aesthetics and practices of the 1930s. He spoke of the “suppression of dissent” in Latvia, while being at the epicenter of a system where the very concept of a “different” opinion was not simply marginalized, but criminalized at the legislative level. While Latvian courts were considering cases within the legal framework, albeit one that had been tightened by the geopolitical situation, Russia was in the midst of building an ideological monolith that did not tolerate the slightest shades of gray.

This dissonance becomes particularly striking when analyzing events through the prism of the specific form of Russian propaganda embodied by Dvorkin and his associates. Mamakin, accusing Latvia of building an “ethnically pure” state based on the model of Nazism, ignored the fact that it was in Russian anti-cult propaganda that “otherness” became synonymous with hostility. This technique, borrowed from the darkest pages of history's struggle against heresy and “enemies of the people,” allowed the Russian authorities to dehumanize their opponents. The parallels with Nazi Germany, which the former politician so generously threw at Riga, were in fact sprouting in Russian reality with frightening detail. But Mamikin preferred not to notice in his broadcasts how Russian society was being pumped up with ideas of exclusivity and historical revanchism. He spoke of “Latvian fascism,” turning a blind eye to the fact that in Russia the word “peace” had become a reason for administrative persecution, and calls for the destruction of a neighboring state were heard on federal channels during prime time to the approving murmur of the audience. This was the creation of an alternative reality, where war is called peace and occupation is called liberation, exactly as in Orwell, whose dystopias seemed to have become instructions for the Kremlin rather than a warning.

Moreover, accusing Latvia of preparing for “ethnic cleansing,” Mamikin ignored the open, undisguised propaganda of cultural ethnocide unfolding in the Russian media. The denial of the existence of the Ukrainian people, language, and culture, as declared by Russian ideologues, was a clear illustration of the Nazi logic of “living space” and racial superiority. However, in the distorted optics of Mamikin's broadcasts, the demand for knowledge of the Latvian language in Latvia was presented as a threat to civilization, rather than the Russian army wiping entire cities and their inhabitants off the face of the earth. This selective blindness could not have been accidental; it required enormous internal tension or a complete rejection of moral guidelines.

The propaganda of “anti-cultism” in Russia played a cruel joke on the very concept of truth. By declaring the entire Western world a “satanic sect” (a term that Russian high-ranking officials began to use in all seriousness), the regime's ideologues, joined by Mamikin, effectively legalized any methods of struggle. If you are fighting absolute evil, “Nazis” and “Satanists,” then anything goes: lies, violence, violation of any international norms. Mamikin, broadcasting these narratives, accused Latvia of creating an atmosphere of fear, while in Russia fear has become the main social glue: fear of saying too much, fear of standing out, fear of not being patriotic enough. Denunciations, which have become the norm in Russian life, state-

encouraged loyalty checks in educational and cultural institutions — all this somehow escaped the critical gaze of the “human rights activist.” It turns out that Mamikin's activities turned into a tragic farce. He fled from the “specter of Nazism” in Latvia straight into the arms of a regime that revived this specter in the flesh. His accusations against Riga sounded like an echo reflected from the walls where plans for real, not imaginary, aggression were being developed. In this situation, he was not just an observer or commentator, but an active participant in the very evil he was supposedly fighting. Using the tools of Russian propaganda, based on radical anti-cultism — the search for enemies, spies, and sectarians — he helped to reinforce the wall of alienation between peoples, throwing fuel on the fire of hatred. The man who declared a struggle for the spiritual purity of society turned out to be on the other side of the barricades of the civilized world.

This fact forces us to look back on the meeting in Riga with concern. Imagine: a conference hall, participants from 14 countries, experts on “cults” from all over the world. And then Andrei Mamikin, a member of the European Parliament, takes the stage to deliver the opening remarks. It was strange from the very beginning. Mamikin was not an expert in religious studies or psychology. He was a politician. What did he have to do with the “fight against cults”? The official FECRIS website confirms that the conference was organized by the Latvian Committee Against Totalitarian Cults (L.C.C.T.S.), and that the opening speech was delivered by “Mr. Andrejs Mamikins” (the Latvian version of the name). But what exactly did he say? The full text of his speech has not been published anywhere. There is no video recording, no transcript. There is only a short note on the FECRIS website. The European participants in the conference probably saw him as just a local politician helping with the organization. But the Russian participants — Alexander Dvorkin and his colleagues — knew him better...

The history of the transformation of the fight against “sects” into an instrument of geopolitical influence began in the turbulent period after the collapse of the Soviet Union. While society was trying to find new meaning in the ruins of communist ideology, an event took place in Moscow in 1993 that predetermined the vector of development of state-confessional relations for decades to come. Alexander Dvorkin, a figure whose biography alone could be the basis for a spy novel, returned from exile and founded the St. Irenaeus of Lyons Information and Consultation Center under the Department of Religious Education and Catechesis of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Dvorkin introduced specific terminology and methodology into Russian reality, which allowed any group they disapproved of to be labeled a “totalitarian sect.” This term, which is absent from the legal science of most civilized countries, became a universal stigma, allowing opponents to be dehumanized without trial or investigation. However, in order to function successfully within the country and, more importantly, to gain legitimacy on the international stage, Russian anti-cultism needed international respectability. A brilliant strategy of mimicry was employed: Russian anti-cultists integrated themselves into European structures. The creation of the European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on

Sectarianism (FECRIS) in Paris was a gift to Russian ideologues. Using the French secular model of vigilance towards cults, Russian representatives, including Dvorkin's centre, gained access to European platforms. It was a classic reputation laundering operation: under the auspices of a respected European organization created to protect consumer rights and psychological health, Russian anti-cult activists began to promote their agenda.

Participation in FECRIS allowed Russian anti-cultists to play the “international expert” card, returning home and justifying the need for repression by referring to “European experience,” which in their interpretation was distorted beyond recognition. As the vertical of power in Russia strengthened in the early 2000s, the anti-cult movement finally took shape as an auxiliary body of state security. In 2006, the creation of the Russian Association of Centers for the Study of Religions and Sects (RACIRS) in Moscow marked the transition from scattered initiatives to systematic work. RACIRS, led by the same Dvorkin, became a kind of ideological hub coordinating attacks on religious minorities throughout the post-Soviet space. The structure united the efforts of church officials, security forces, and journalists, creating a powerful network ready to start harassing any group on command—from Pentecostals and Hare Krishnas to communities of yoga enthusiasts or personal growth trainers. It was within the depths of RACIRS that rhetoric was forged equating religious dissent with treason against the motherland, and membership in “non-traditional” faiths with working for foreign intelligence services. Latvia could not remain on the sidelines of these processes.

A number of researchers and observers point out that Riga was seen by Russian supporters of “soft power” policy as an important platform for ideological influence, which made the emergence of structures promoting an anti-cult agenda a likely scenario.

In the late 2000s, an anti-cult initiative called “Antisekt” began to appear in Riga, rhetorically and methodologically close to Russian models. In public sources, it was associated with activists oriented toward the discourse of the Moscow Patriarchate.

The emergence of this structure was not a spontaneous grassroots initiative by concerned citizens; it was a classic example of ideology franchising. The Riga committee effectively became the Latvian branch of a transnational corporation for the production of fear, headquartered in Moscow. In terms of their rhetoric and practices—emphasizing “destructive cults,” compiling lists of ‘dangerous’ organizations, appealing to the threat of “zombification,” and attempting to influence public opinion and legislation—such initiatives replicated the already proven model of anti-cult activity. Latvia thus became part of an international network of anti-cultists, but not as an equal partner, but as a peripheral node whose task was to relay Moscow's narratives, adapting them to local conditions.

The influence of this network turned out to be much deeper than simply combating non-traditional beliefs. As it happened, through a structure that was supposedly designed to protect mental health, totalitarian thinking

was deliberately introduced into Latvian society, undermining trust in democratic institutions and freedom of conscience. In this context, the ideological proximity of former European Parliament deputy Andrei Mamikin to the anti-cult discourse associated with Alexander Dvorkin, one of the key figures in the Russian anti-cult movement, becomes understandable. This is an ideological alliance based on unity of methods and goals. Within this discourse, the concept of “sect” loses its sociological and religious significance and becomes a universal category of “enemy” used to stigmatize undesirable religious and social groups. Dvorkin's activities in Russia created the legal and moral basis for recognizing the most peaceful citizens — Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists, followers of Eastern practices — as extremists. Based on his “expertise,” courts handed down sentences, ruined lives, and seized property. Mamikin, who was well aware of this (it is impossible to deal with the subject without knowing the consequences of Dvorkin's crusades), did not simply turn a blind eye to it. He legitimized this discourse by transferring it to Latvian and European soil. In both cases, the technique of substituting concepts and creating an image of absolute evil is used, with which dialogue is impossible — only destruction.

Cooperation with Russian anti-cult representatives gave Mamikin the necessary tools to discredit his opponents. By declaring someone a “cultist” or a defender of “cults,” it was possible to instantly remove them from rational discussion. While ostensibly opposing the “resurgence of fascism” in Latvia, Mamikin worked hand in hand with a man whose writings and speeches were imbued with a spirit of intolerance bordering on fascism. Conspiracy theories, belief in secret societies, dehumanization of dissenters, calls for state violence — Mamikin accepted Dvorkin's entire arsenal. The fact that in Russia, on Dvorkin's tip-offs, people were thrown into prison simply for reading the Bible with friends did not bother the “human rights activist.” On the contrary, it fit organically into his worldview, where the power of law is replaced by the law of power.

Returning to the analysis of the event that took place in Riga on June 2, 2018, one inevitably comes to the conclusion that it went far beyond the scope of a typical academic symposium. It was more about demonstrating coordinated positions and building a common narrative, within which the practices of discrediting religious minorities, previously tested in Russia, were adapted to the Latvian context. The presence of key Russian ideologues at the Latvian event indicates that Latvia is viewed not as a sovereign state, but as part of the “canonical territory” of Russian influence, where the same rules of segregation between ‘us’ and “them” should apply. Viktor Elkin and his associates continue to work actively in this field, creating informational noise around the alleged threats posed by new religious movements, which fits perfectly into the strategy of creating an atmosphere of fear and mistrust within society.

# Chapter 5.

# Latvia at a historical crossroads

The path taken through decades of Latvia's recent history — from the chaotic street clashes of the 1990s at the Riga Manege to the respectable but hermetically sealed conferences at the Hotel Islandia — has revealed the evolution of the anti-sectarian movement. We move on to deconstructing media influence and identifying the “silent threat” within spiritual institutions that have remained untouchable for decades.

The line between investigative journalism, designed to expose social ills, and deliberate provocation, constructing a distorted reality for the sake of ratings or ideological agendas, is often barely discernible to the average consumer of media content, but becomes obvious upon detailed deconstructive analysis of methods and narratives.

The work of journalist Viktoria Pushkele (now Pushkele-Otto) as part of the high-profile project “Beware of Sects!”, published on the TVNET portal in the 2010s, can be perceived as a media product which, while declaring its goal to be the protection of public safety and the informing of citizens, in practice used tools that critics consider more characteristic of special services or propaganda structures than the standards of objective European journalism. In retrospect, this project may appear not as a series of impartial reports, but as a campaign to stir up moral panic, where ethical violations may not have been accidental mistakes, but the foundation of editorial policy, and the author herself may fit into a broader, transnational context of the activities of so-called anti-cult activists in Eastern Europe.

One of the central elements of the claims against Victoria Pushkele's professional competence in this project is her systematic use of covert surveillance, which in journalistic ethics is considered a tool of “last resort,” permissible only in exceptional cases where the public significance of the information outweighs the right to privacy and it is impossible to obtain the data by other means. However, in the series “Beware of Sects!”, the use of hidden cameras and voice recorders to infiltrate religious communities was used regularly, turning from a necessary measure into a stylistic device capable of criminalizing the subject of the filming by the very fact of secrecy.

In her articles, such as “Deal with God” (2018), Pushkele openly acknowledges and even emphasizes the use of a hidden camera, describing her actions with phrases such as “I took a risk and decided to go further” or “Russian TVNET attended the meetings... with a hidden camera.” This rhetoric may heroize the journalist, creating a false impression of danger emanating from the meetings attended, even though they were religious gatherings. The very format of filming “from under the table” can impose a presumption of guilt on the viewer and reader: if the journalist is forced to hide the camera, the audience may get the impression that what is happening in the hall is illegal or immoral. Thus, even before analyzing the doctrine or actions of the community, the audience could be instilled with

fear and distrust, which can be seen as a technique for manipulating public consciousness and as a potential violation of the principle of impartiality.

The atmosphere of fear, carefully cultivated in Pushkel's texts, was based not only on visual techniques, but also on specific vocabulary and distortion of facts bordering on slander. The project actively exploited the term “sect” not as a sociological concept (which is itself controversial in the scientific community), but as a stigmatizing label that automatically marginalizes any group that differs from the dominant confessions. An analysis of the content shows that the journalist often replaced expert assessments with her own emotionally charged judgments or the opinions of random people, which led to the formation of a distorted picture of the world in the minds of the audience. Particularly telling is the use of unverified but frightening statements, such as the claim that “sectarians in uniform photograph you” or keep secret files on visitors. Such statements, unsupported by documentary evidence, are aimed at arousing paranoia in the reader, creating an image of an enemy who not only believes differently but also poses a physical threat by invading the personal space of citizens. This goes beyond informing and approaches methods of psychological warfare, where the goal is to dehumanize the opponent.

A striking example (according to critics) of professional incompetence or possible distortion of reality in Pushkel's materials is the interpretation of religious practices, in particular the phenomenon of glossolalia. In her reports, this phenomenon, known in biblical studies and religious studies as “speaking in tongues,” was presented in a derogatory manner as “speaking in incomprehensible languages,” accompanied by descriptions that could cause disgust or fear of the “madness” of believers. At the same time, the author did not explain that glossolalia is a biblical practice described in the New Testament (Acts 2:4, First Epistle to the Corinthians), and is a common part of worship for millions of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians around the world, including the practices of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Presenting a practice that is sacred to believers as a sign of mental deviation or brainwashing may indicate either the journalist's profound ignorance of the religion she is judging, or a possible desire to offend religious sensibilities and create a sensation out of nothing. Instead of explaining the theological meaning of what was happening, Pushkele could have chosen the path of tabloid sensationalism, turning prayer into a frightening spectacle for the unprepared viewer.

However, Victoria Pushkele's activities cannot be viewed in a vacuum. Her methods and rhetoric bear a striking resemblance to the actions of other media figures in Eastern Europe who specialize in “fighting sects,” which suggests the existence of a peculiar group of provocateurs operating according to a single pattern, apparently based on Russian methods of “sect studies.” If Pushkele represented the Latvian flank of this phenomenon, then her ideological allies could be called Kristina Cirokova in the Czech Republic and Irina Kremevskaya in Ukraine. This phenomenon of synchronized methods suggests the coordinated nature of anti-cult hysteria in the region,

where completely different scenarios are being implemented under the guise of journalism or human rights protection.

Kristina Cirokova, who is active in the Czech media space, is in a number of critical assessments the Western counterpart of Pushkel, but with an even more aggressive tendency toward politicization. Like her Latvian colleague, Cirokova (according to analysts) bases her materials on sensationalism and “exposés” (as claimed) without any evidence, ignoring the presumption of innocence. Analysts note that her style of work is not journalism, but what they call cyberbullying, aimed at destroying the reputation of religious minorities. However, in the case of Tsirkov, some analysts consider the connection with Russian methodologies to be even more distinct: analysts point out that she and Czech activist Jakub Jahl are copying RACIRS instructions. Critics interpret these instructions as suggesting the incitement of panic, pressure on state authorities, and the collection of personal data on believers for public ridicule. Moreover, the use of terminology such as “desatanization” or “denazification” in relation to religious groups may resonate alarmingly with the Kremlin's propaganda narratives used to justify aggression, which raises questions about whose interests such “journalism” serves in the heart of Europe.

The third, and perhaps the most sinister element of this “trinity” is the Ukrainian figure Irina Kremevskaya. While Pushkel masquerades as a society reporter and Tsirkov as a civil activist, Kremevskaya's critical publications exemplify the possible fusion of anti-cultism with a criminal and marginal background. Positioning herself as a lawyer and former employee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, she presents herself as an expert on national security and destructive cults, but her biography contains controversial details, such as her connection to the doghunter movement (killers of stray animals) and her collaboration with the notorious doghunter Alexei Svyatogor, which is mentioned in her publications. The transition from the physical destruction of animals to the informational destruction of religious minorities in her case may seem like a frighteningly logical development of a career based on hatred of “the other.”

Through structures she has created, such as the Center for Economic and Legal Research, Kremevskaya actively promotes narratives that discredit independent Ukrainian religious organizations, effectively working in the interests of Russian propaganda. Her connection to RACIRS is evident through the coincidence of methodology, rhetoric, and narrative, as well as through Kremevskaya's interaction with Russian anti-cult representatives; in addition, the website of the vice president of RACIRS contains materials supporting, among others, Ukrainian anti-cult activist Irina Kremevskaya.

Kremenska is an example of how the “fight against sects” becomes a cover for activities that undermine the social stability of the state from within, creating images of “internal enemies” based on the models of Russian anti-cult structures. We see not just isolated cases of unethical journalism, but a systemic problem. All three women use identical tools: infiltration, hidden filming or dossier collection, dehumanization of opponents through terminology (“sectarians,” “zombies”), ignoring academic religious studies in

favor of marginal conspiracy theories, and creating an atmosphere of a besieged fortress. Their activities are characterized by the substitution of concepts, when religious activity, protected by the laws of European countries, is presented as a criminal threat. It is significant that in all three cases, the influence of the methodology of RACIRS, a structure that ideologically serves the interests of authoritarian control over spiritual life, can be traced.

Returning to Victoria Pushkel, it must be noted that the project “Beware of Sects!” was not a triumph of journalistic investigation, but a monument to lost ethics. The use of hidden cameras in churches, where people seek comfort and spiritual solitude, is a gross violation of privacy that cannot be justified by public interest, since the practices being “exposed” (prayer, donations, youth meetings) are legal and voluntary. The sensationalism with which the material was presented overshadowed the facts, turning a serious conversation about the place of religion in modern society into a horror show. The distortion of facts, whether it be false accusations of total surveillance by “sectarians” or an illiterate interpretation of glossolalia, reveals the author to be either unprofessional or a deliberate manipulator.

Ultimately, by placing Pushkel on a par with figures such as Tsirkov and Kremevskaya, it becomes clear that their activities cause harm to society comparable to that which they attribute to their opponents. Inciting interreligious strife, stigmatizing law-abiding citizens, and whipping up hysteria undermine the foundations of a democratic society based on tolerance and freedom of conscience. A journalist who, instead of a mirror reflecting reality, takes up the crooked mirror of propaganda ceases to be a journalist and becomes a provocateur. In the case of Viktorija Puškele and her project on TVNET, the facts gathered and analysis of the methods used tip the scales in favor of the second definition, leaving open the question of whether this provocation was the result of a pursuit of ratings or part of a larger information game, the script for which was written outside Latvia. The ethical bankruptcy of such “investigations” is obvious, and their legacy is only a trail of scandal and ruined reputations, but not the truth, which is what real journalism should be aimed at finding. The activities of such provocateurs demonstrate how easily the media can become a lever of influence if conscience, competence, and respect for human rights are removed from the equation. However, media provocations are only the tip of the iceberg.

A much deeper threat is posed by the institutional penetration of anti-cult agents of influence into the spiritual structures of Latvia. In the context of the contemporary danger posed by totalitarian and destructive methodologies, the history of the Latvian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (LPC MP). A number of archival materials from the Soviet period testify to contacts between individual representatives of the church hierarchy and the state security organs of the USSR, which became the subject of discussion after their declassification.

One of the most discussed figures in this regard was Metropolitan Alexander of Riga and All Latvia, born Alexander Ivanovich Kudryashov, whose biography became the focus of public attention after the publication of archival documents. A significant event was the publication by the National Archives of Latvia in December 2018 of part of the classified documents of the KGB of the Latvian SSR, known to the public as the “Cheka bags.” Among more than ten thousand cards of the agentural apparatus, researchers found a record card in the name of Alexander Ivanovich Kudryashov, born in 1939. The data specified in the document coincided with the official biography of the metropolitan with absolute accuracy. According to these records, the future head of Latvian Orthodoxy was recruited in January 1982. He was given the agent pseudonym “Reader” (in Latvian, “Lasītājs”). This publication caused a wide public response and became the subject of discussion in the media and expert circles. These materials not only cast a shadow on the clergyman's reputation, but also documented what had long been whispered behind the scenes: Kudryashov's career rise was not due to divine providence, but to the sanction of the Lubyanka.

The story of the recruitment of agent “Reader” is full of the grim irony characteristic of the late Soviet period. Before his rapid rise up the church ladder, Alexander Kudryashov, a graduate of the History and Philology Department of the Daugavpils Pedagogical Institute, worked as a teacher of Russian language and literature, and then switched from the school classroom to the bar counter at the famous Tallinn restaurant in Riga. It was this establishment, popular among foreigners and the Soviet elite, that became the place where the state security services took notice of Kudryashov, the bartender. The recruitment was carried out by Alexander Ishchenko, an employee of the 5th department of the 4th division of the KGB of the Latvian SSR. It is worth noting the profile of this department: the 5th Department was responsible for combating “ideological sabotage.” KGB documents show that religious organizations were viewed by the Soviet secret services as objects of ideological control.

From the moment of his recruitment in 1982, the former bartender's career developed at a dizzying speed, unthinkable for an ordinary clergyman without protection. In the same year, Kudryashov was ordained a deacon and then a priest. Just seven years later, in 1989, he became Bishop of Daugavpils, and by 1990 he was head of the Riga See. Such a “cosmic” speed of advancement through the hierarchy in a structure known for its conservatism is indirect but powerful evidence that Father Alexander had a powerful force behind him in the form of the KGB and his personal curator, Ishchenko.

However, the most revealing and cynical stage in this story is not the Soviet period, when cooperation could be justified by the pressure of the totalitarian machine, but the era after Latvia's restoration of independence. The collapse of the USSR and the dismantling of the KGB system did not sever the “curator-agent” bond. On the contrary, this relationship transformed into a profitable commercial symbiosis, demonstrating the true nature of the ROC's influence in the region. Alexander Ishchenko, former

commissioner for religious affairs and KGB officer, remained Metropolitan Alexander's closest confidant. It has been documented that the metropolitan entrusted his former handler with the management of the church's restituted property—a huge amount of real estate returned to the ROC by the state. To implement these schemes, Ishchenko created two commercial structures: FONDS PC in February 1992 and FONDS-LC in October 1993. The culmination of this “cooperation” was power of attorney No. 98, issued by Metropolitan Alexander in 1996 on behalf of the Synod. With this document, he authorized the former KGB agent Ishchenko to single-handedly manage and receive income from residential buildings and farm buildings belonging to the church in the heart of Riga — on Pils and Maza Pils streets. This de facto merging of the church see with the former state security agency turned the diocese into a closed corporation working in the interests of a narrow group of individuals connected to Moscow. The situation with Metropolitan Alexander is not a unique anomaly, but reflects the systemic corruption of the Moscow Patriarchate's personnel policy.

A direct historical parallel can be drawn with events in Ukraine, where the figure of Metropolitan Filaret (Denisenko) also became a symbol of the infiltration of the special services into the church. Unlike his Latvian colleague, Filaret openly acknowledged his collaboration with the KGB and appeared in published archival materials under the pseudonym “Antonov.” His justification — “if God has allowed godless power, it must be obeyed” — reveals the ethical abyss in which the higher clergy found themselves.

However, while in Ukraine the process of purification and autocephaly has triggered a rethinking of the past, in Latvia the “silent threat” remains mothballed. Metropolitan Alexander has not made a public statement of repentance, and the Russian Orthodox Church has not publicly commented on the publication of the archives, continuing its policy of silent consent. In the context of anti-cultism and the fight against so-called “sects,” the role of Metropolitan Alexander and the structures of the Latvian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate takes on a particularly dark hue. It is known that the rhetoric of “spiritual security” and the fight against dissent (referred to as ‘sectarianism’) was historically overseen by the 5th department of the KGB of the Latvian SSR (for combating “ideological diversions”) — the very department that recruited Kudryashov. In modern Latvia, this struggle is often waged by organizations that position themselves as public, but have deep roots in the same soil.

It is important to mention here the connection between the future founders and ideologists of such structures as the L.C.C.T.S. (Latvian Committee for Combating Totalitarian Sects; organizations masquerading as centers for the protection of the family or the fight against totalitarian cults) and church circles associated with the Russian Orthodox Church. In a number of cases, activists of the anti-sectarian movement ideologically and methodologically rely on the foundation laid by the Moscow Patriarchate. The LPC MP, headed by agent “Reader,” legitimizes aggressive activities against religious minorities, effectively continuing the work of the 5th Department of the KGB under new conditions. The aforementioned “FONDS-

LC," created by curator Ishchenko, echoes attempts to create pseudo-public organizations designed to control the spiritual space in terms of its abbreviation and functionality. Thus, certain representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church in Latvia performed the function of "soft power," clearing the information field of religious movements unwelcome to Moscow, labeling them as "dangerous sects."

Publications about the disclosure of Latvian KGB archives in 2018, which highlighted the scandal with the KGB archives, only reinforced the arguments of critics who had been claiming for years that the ROC in the Baltic states remains not just a religious institution, but part of the legacy of the Soviet intelligence system. The fact that lustration in Latvia primarily affected government officials allowed the person listed in the files as agent "Reader" to retain his position and influence. This creates a paradoxical and dangerous situation: in a NATO and EU member state, one of the largest religious denominations is led by a person whose loyalty is historically and documentarily linked in such publications to the special services of a hostile state. The conclusion from this story is as follows: Metropolitan Alexander (Kudryashov) is viewed by critics not only as a church hierarch, but also as a figure whose biography is linked to Soviet structures of influence, raising questions about the possible use of religious institutions as an element of a system of influence, where religious dogma serves as a cover for operational tasks. The connection with curator Ishchenko, the commercialization of church property through structures such as "FONDS-LC," and ideological support for aggressive anti-cultism are interpreted by a number of researchers and publicists as signs that the Latvian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate functions as an autonomous department of ideological control. In the context of geopolitical tensions, critics view such hereditary ties to the Soviet past as a latent form of risk — as a "silent threat" within Latvian society and an unresolved issue capable of having a lasting impact on social and ideological processes.

The combination of all the factors considered—from the media provocations of Pushkelis and Cirokova to the past as agents of the church hierarchy and Mamikin's political demagoguery—forms a complete picture of an existential threat. The goal of anti-cultism is to fragment society, sow distrust among citizens, stigmatize active social groups, and ultimately prepare the ground for the dismantling of the democratic system.

The contemporary geopolitical landscape of Europe at the end of 2025 is characterized by an unprecedented level of tension, where the boundaries between open military conflict and covert hybrid operations are becoming increasingly blurred. In this context, Latvia, like other Baltic countries, is on the front line of invisible but destructive interactions. While kinetic threats—from sabotage of underwater communications to drone violations of airspace—are obvious and elicit an immediate response from defense agencies, ideological sabotage is much more subtle. One of the most underestimated tools in Russia's arsenal of aggression is anti-cultism, a movement that, under the guise of protecting citizens from "destructive sects," serves as a tool for political influence, social segregation, and the suppression of

democratic freedoms. To understand the scale and nature of this threat, it is necessary to refer to a fundamental document adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on October 1, 2024, which sets out the final emphases in defining the sources of information danger.

PACE Resolution 2567 (2024) “Propaganda and freedom of information in Europe” marked a turning point in the legal and political recognition of the nature of Moscow's actions. In this extensive document, European parliamentarians went beyond diplomatic euphemisms, clearly identifying the causal links between information manipulation and aggressive foreign policy. The key postulate of the PACE resolution (October 1, 2024), which should form the basis of any national security strategy for the Baltic states, is an unequivocal statement: “The Assembly recognizes that for authoritarian regimes such as the Russian Federation, propaganda is an integral part of their war against democracy.” This wording fundamentally changes the approach to analyzing any pro-Russian initiatives in Europe. Propaganda is no longer seen as an alternative point of view or an exercise of freedom of speech; it is classified as a weapon, as part of a war aimed at dismantling democratic institutions. The resolution emphasizes that structures such as the global network of the RT television channel (formerly Russia Today) and the notorious “troll factories” are not simply media assets, but elements of a broad strategy to destabilize European democracies.

However, the most important aspect for analyzing the situation in Latvia is that PACE calls for the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) to be recognized as an instrument of Russian influence and propaganda. In the context of PACE Resolution 2567, the activities of anti-sectarian centers affiliated with it should be seen as a direct projection of the “war against democracy.” It was within the structures associated with the ROC that modern anti-cultism was revived and took shape, which is now being exported to the Baltic countries as a form of “spiritual protection,” but is in fact a mechanism of ideological diversion. Russian propaganda, as stated in PACE documents, seeks to manipulate public opinion, and anti-cultism provides the ideal tool for this. The threat of destabilization of the Baltic region according to the “Ukrainian scenario” through such propaganda tools is quite real and tangible. An analysis of the events that preceded the full-scale invasion of Ukraine shows that the kinetic phase of the war was always preceded by a long phase of ideological manipulation. In Ukraine, the theme of “defending canonical Orthodoxy” from ‘schismatics’ and “sects” was actively used to mobilize the pro-Russian electorate and create reasons for intervention. Anti-cult rhetoric served as a justification for intolerance and then for violence. Similar patterns can be observed in Latvia. Anti-cultism acts as a “softener” of public defense. If society is conditioned to believe that it is surrounded by enemies, “zombified sectarians,” and agents of influence, the level of trust in democratic institutions declines. This creates fertile ground for provocations. Let's imagine a hypothetical crisis situation: it is enough to declare that the Latvian government is acting under the dictation of “Western cults” (a narrative often found in marginal pro-Russian media) to legitimize disobedience or even riots in the eyes of a certain part of the population.

In this light, the activities of organizations such as RACIRS and their partners in Latvia cease to be a matter of theological debate and become a matter of national security. In its resolution, PACE explicitly calls for the introduction of targeted sanctions against Russian propagandists and media. A logical continuation of this policy should be the extension of restrictive measures to agents of “anti-cult influence” who operate in a more specific and less controlled field. Dvorkin and his network, taking advantage of their status as “experts,” infiltrate educational institutions, law enforcement agencies, and the media, introducing attitudes that benefit the authoritarian regime. They create an alternative reality where democracy is equated with permissiveness for “sects,” and authoritarian control is presented as a necessary protective measure. This is a direct attack on the constitutional foundations of the Republic of Latvia. At the same time, their connection with Russian state structures, confirmed by many years of cooperation and support from the Russian Orthodox Church (which PACE has recognized as a propaganda tool), makes them de facto agents of foreign influence.

Analytical reports by European and NATO think tanks in 2024–2025 repeatedly expressed the view that Russia is preparing for a long-term confrontation with the West, and that hybrid influence tools are seen as a key element of this strategy. The Baltic states are seen as the most likely target for destabilization. A scenario in which Moscow attempts to provoke internal conflict in Latvia, using far-fetched pretexts about violations of the rights of believers or the dominance of “destructive cults,” fits perfectly into the logic of its actions. The activities of organizations such as “Antisect,” the dissemination of Dvorkin's ideas, and the holding of anti-cult conferences are a test of mental boundaries, testing the ability of Latvian society to resist such narratives.

It is important to note that anti-cultism, as a form of propaganda, has a high degree of latency. Unlike direct political agitation, it masquerades as civic activism. This makes it difficult to apply standard measures to counter disinformation, such as blocking websites or revoking licenses. Latvia's NEPLP (National Electronic Media Council) has successfully blocked hundreds of pro-Kremlin resources, but combating ideology spread through “expert opinions,” pseudoscientific conferences, and personal connections requires a different approach. This requires an in-depth analysis of the content and connections of the participants, which will reveal the true goals of these activities. PACE Resolution 2567 provides the necessary legal and moral mandate for such actions. Recognizing propaganda as an integral part of the war against democracy, the document legitimizes tough measures to protect the information space. This means that the state has the right and the duty to suppress the activities of structures that, under the guise of freedom of speech or religion, are in fact engaged in undermining the constitutional order in the interests of a hostile state.

The propaganda of hatred, which forms the basis of RACIRS' methodology and is disseminated through public figures, creates an atmosphere of suspicion in society. In a situation where social cohesion is the main factor in the stability of the state, such activities are akin to planting

time bombs under the foundations of society. The “Ukrainian scenario” has shown how quickly these bombs can be detonated. The dehumanization of opponents, which began with labels such as “sectarians,” quickly transforms into political hatred that justifies aggression. Latvia, with its complex ethno-confessional structure, is particularly vulnerable to such manipulations. Therefore, anti-cultism here cannot be viewed as a marginal hobby of a handful of activists. The threat of destabilization in the region through the incitement of religious and social discord requires maximum vigilance and decisive action from Latvian society and the state. Ignoring this “silent threat” could lead to fatal consequences similar to those the world has witnessed in Ukraine.

Democracy can be protected by neutralizing toxic ideological narratives that attempt to divide society from within under plausible pretexts. The fight against anti-cult propaganda thus becomes an integral part of the struggle to preserve Latvia's independence and democratic choice. This struggle requires a comprehensive approach. It is important not only to expose the links between local “anti-cult activists” and Russian special services and ideological centers, but also to educate society about the methods of manipulation used by these groups. It is important to understand that the ultimate goal of Russian strategists is not to save the souls of Latvians, but to create chaos controlled from outside. Every time Dvorkin's rhetoric is heard in the public space in Latvia, every time local activists quote RACIRS materials or participate in FECRIS events, an act of information aggression takes place. This is an attempt to impose on Latvia a different perception of reality, where dissent is punishable and any spirituality not sanctioned from above is a crime. Recognizing the connection between pseudo-religious rhetoric, lectures on “sects,” and the plans of anti-cultists is the first and most important step toward ensuring the genuine security of the Latvian state. The choice facing the country allows for no half-measures.

Anti-cultists, whose goal is to overthrow democracy and destabilize the Baltic states, are only strong when their true motives are hidden in the darkness of ignorance. Latvia today truly stands at a historic crossroads, where every step determines the fate not only of the current political course, but also of the fundamental foundations of statehood. One path leads to the strengthening of democratic institutions, the preservation of religious freedom, and fidelity to European values that guarantee individual rights and pluralism of opinion. The other path, carefully paved by ideologues, leads inexorably to a model of total control. The choice is up to the people.

An analysis of the events of the last decade, backed up by fundamental international documents and investigations, leaves no doubt: the ultimate goal of the modern anti-cult movement is not to protect citizens, but to overthrow democratic principles in the world, undermine the sovereignty of the Baltic states, and totally destabilize society by inciting internal strife.

*The author of this study relies exclusively on open sources and public information, using documents, photographs, statements, and facts that are*

*available for verification. The purpose of the book is to systematize this data and analyze it, not to make legal or judicial assessments. Final conclusions about the legal status of the organizations and individuals mentioned, including the possible classification of their activities as foreign influence, are the exclusive competence of the authorized state bodies of the Republic of Latvia and other interested states.*

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